



3 1761 03562 5276

Seton-Watson, Robert William
The historian as a political
force in central Europe

D
16
.2
S39



Presented to the
LIBRARY *of the*
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
by

PROFESSOR PETER BROCK

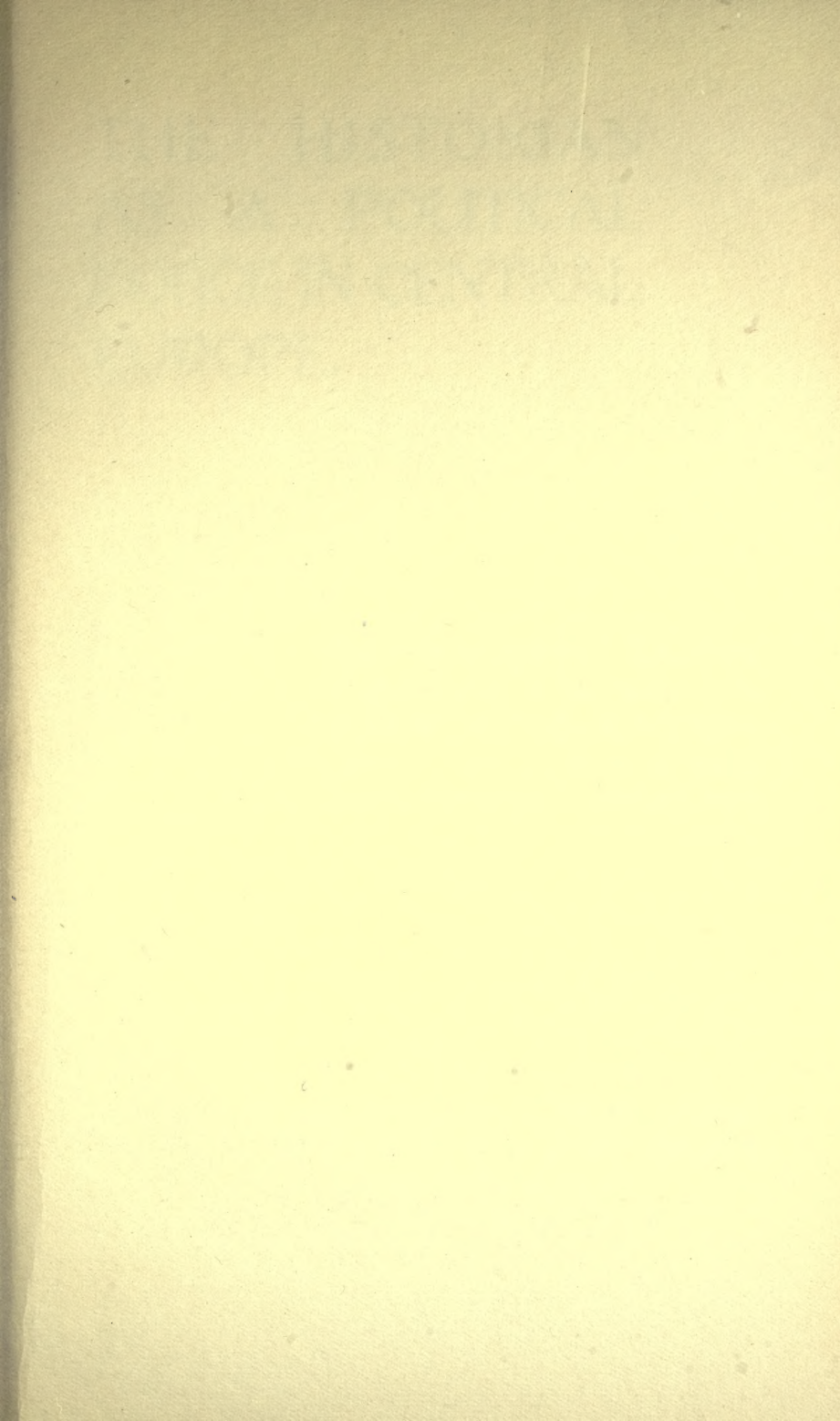
P Brock
THE HISTORIAN
AS A POLITICAL
FORCE IN CENTRAL
EUROPE.

AN INAUGURAL LECTURE
DELIVERED ON 22 NOVEMBER 1922,
BY R.W. SETON-WATSON,
D.Litt., D.Phil., Professor of Central
European History in the University of London.

PUBLISHED BY THE SCHOOL OF SLAVONIC STUDIES
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, KING'S COLLEGE.

EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, LIMITED,
His Majesty's Printers, at 9 East Harding Street, E.C. 4.

PRICE 2/- NET.



THE HISTORIAN AS A POLITICAL FORCE IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

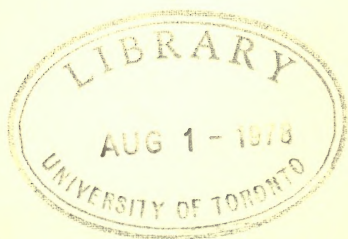
AN INAUGURAL LECTURE
DELIVERED ON 2 NOVEMBER 1922,
BY R.W. SETON-WATSON,
D.Litt., D.Phil., Professor of Central
European History in the University of London.

PUBLISHED BY THE SCHOOL OF SLAVONIC STUDIES
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, KING'S COLLEGE.

EYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, LIMITED,
His Majesty's Printers, at 9 East Harding St., E.C. 4.

*Je continuerai toujours à dire ce qui me parait bon et juste
sans me gêner le moins du monde. C'est par là que je vaux
si je vaux quelque chose.*

JOSEPH DE MAISTRE (1805).



D
16
.2
S39

PREFACE.

THE foundation of this Chair represents a further stage in the organisation of the School of Slavonic Studies at King's College, and it is therefore a duty of piety and friendship to recall the immense debt which our School owes to the late Dr. Ronald Burrows. It was he who first brought us into being, and who in this, as in so many other directions, supplied the motive force, the sympathy, the breadth of vision, without which mountains cannot be moved either in the academic or in the political world.

This is also a fitting occasion on which to express my gratitude to the Rev. Dr. W. A. Fearon, formerly Headmaster of Winchester, who kindly acted as Chairman at my inaugural lecture. To his vivid and inspiring teaching of history, to his scrupulous balancing of rival facts and opinions, and to his untiring interest in the special work which he gave me to do, I owe a debt which can never be fully repaid.

R. W. SETON-WATSON.

1 December, 1922.

THE HISTORIAN AS A POLITICAL FORCE IN CENTRAL EUROPE.

I

IF it is customary for each new holder of a historical chair to give some account of the faith that is in him and of the lines which he intends to follow, this is doubly necessary in the case of an entirely new Chair, which is the first of its kind to be created in any British University and whose very foundation is in itself a programme. It is part of a new evolution, of which we ourselves are not as yet fully conscious—of an experiment in what are known as Regional Studies; and the very fact that it is an experiment compels me to intrude upon you a little of my own philosophy of history, in the endeavour to define the principles on which such a Chair must be conducted.

I do not need to remind you how comparatively recent has been the recognition accorded to modern history as a worthy part of an University curriculum, equal in rank with more venerable studies. Even in Oxford the School of Modern History is only celebrating this term its first jubilee of independent existence,¹ though it may already claim to be the pioneer of systematic historical studies in England.² And yet as late as 1904 the present Regius Professor was still able to quote Bishop Stubbs's deliberate verdict that at Oxford "the *historical* teaching of history" has been practically left out, and to make his inaugural lecture a plea for its insertion.³

At Cambridge there may possibly have been less prejudice to overcome, but there, too, Modern History did not win full recognition till the all too recent period of Seeley

¹ C. H. Firth, *Modern History in Oxford*. pp. 17-21.

² In 1878 Bishop Stubbs expressed his "faith in the permanence and development of a great historical school in England, which will look to Oxford as an *Alma Mater* and *Fons Scientiarum*." (*Seventeen Lectures*, p. 70).

³ *A Plea for the Historical Teaching of History*, especially p. 30.

and of Acton. In the Scottish Universities, despite very ancient traditions of culture and in certain respects a closer contact with the Continent, the teaching of history continued to play an utterly subordinate part until the turn of the century, and although the Government had long conferred the title of Historiographer Royal on a succession of Scottish scholars, it was left to the munificence of a genealogical expert and the successful enterprise of an Exhibition Committee, to endow Scottish history as an academic study in Edinburgh and Glasgow as late as the present century. In the new English Universities, and among them, in our own, historical studies are now firmly established; but they cannot look back upon a long life or epoch-making achievements. In a word, history as an organised study, still more as a professional career, is even to-day in its infancy in this country.

It was a matter of course that in its first stage the new science should concentrate mainly upon English political and constitutional history, though it is true that the history of the Greek and Roman world had long been taught as an annexe to classical studies. The second stage was reached when ecclesiastical history and political economy asserted their separate rights. Then as Victorian England entered upon the era of Imperialist expansion, and as the dogma of "splendid isolation" began to crumble, the vital need for studying Colonial, Indian and American history came to be very widely recognised. The provision of Continental history was merely the last link in a chain of logical sequence. The break-neck pace of modern life could not leave historical studies unaffected, and as ever new means of rapid communication were devised and the diffusion of the press attained hitherto undreamt-of proportions, the bearing of such studies upon international relations, and even upon the vital issues of peace and war, became increasingly obvious. Finally the Great War brought home to the general consciousness the need for mutual interpretation between nation and nation, and at the same time the crying need for a basis of sound historical knowledge in the statesmen who

settle the world's affairs. Consequently there was a sudden outburst of "regional studies," which may have owed its immediate impulse to what our late enemies call "Kriegspsychose," but is none the less solidly grounded in the requirements of the modern world. This new development was especially marked in our own University, which, we must ourselves admit, was selected not for any reason of tradition or natural preeminence, but because it is entrenched at the heart of the greatest city of the British Commonwealth, endowed with unique opportunities for research and international intercourse, such as are even to-day not realised to the full. Just as Burke, the member for Bristol, claimed to be also member for Britain, so London University may in some degree claim to be the University of all those scattered students of the British Commonwealth, who have not as yet found their *alma mater*, and to whom the system of external examination offers opportunities not to be found elsewhere. This I believe to be the real underlying reason why chairs of Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Dutch, Italian and Modern Greek studies followed each other in swift succession, and for the first time in any British University separate provision was made for the teaching of Czech, Serbian, Polish and Roumanian. The School of Slavonic Studies, mainly due to the initiative of the late Dr. Burrows and inaugurated by President Masaryk in the first year of his exile, is a concrete attempt to concentrate and systematise all such studies in so far as they relate to Slavonic countries and to focus, at a convenient centre which happens to lie in London, the more serious students of matters Slavonic. Its insistence upon the regional aspect of such studies—in other words, upon the need of treating each country or nation in its wider setting—is merely a practical application of the view upheld by Arnold and Freeman and most of our historical pioneers, and again by Ranke and the great Germans—the view, namely, of the essential Unity of History and of the need for bringing special periods and areas into line with universal history.

The School of Slavonic Studies has already acquired

an individuality of its own which must not be lost; but it would be the first to welcome any further development such as would make it only one of several sections in a comprehensive School of Foreign Studies, similar in purpose and design to the "Auslandshochschule," whose foundation Berlin was planning on the eve of the Great War. And here, merely in passing, let me illustrate the capital importance attached to such studies on the Continent. During the summer of 1922, regular courses of Russian language and literature—in many cases supplemented by history, in some by economics—were given in seventeen German Universities; while the total number of courses relating to Slavonic countries amounted to eighty—notably in Berlin, Königsberg, Leipzig and the "Ost-Europa-Institut" in Breslau. If, then, the Germans should end by securing a predominant position in the new Russia, it will be the result of superior application and knowledge, harder work and more trained workers. Another, no less remarkable, illustration is the fact that the Czechoslovak Republic has thought it worth while to found in Prague, in addition to the already existing Czech and German Universities, a Russian and an Ukrainian University, both admirably appointed, and also to attract to Prague by special facilities a number of Jugoslav students varying from one to two thousand. This is an investment whose return may well be the intellectual leadership of Czechoslovakia in the Slavonic world a generation hence.

My own Chair is part of the evolution to which I have just alluded, and it is not for me to enquire into its prospects of success, but simply to strive after tangible results. This much at least may be said—that if ever the past neglect of a subject was an adequate reason for the foundation of a Chair devoted to its study, then no new Chair was ever more needed than that of "Central European History." For the neglect of Central Europe, in the widest sense of that term, was throughout the nineteenth century a conspicuous feature of British historical scholarship. In 1876 we find Bishop Stubbs lamenting

that in English there "is no first-class work on German history since Archdeacon Coxe wrote on the House of Austria." This indirect verdict from a man of Stubbs's standards is at once a measure of our neglect and of the distance since travelled in critical tests. For no one to-day would place the worthy Coxe even in the second rank of historians or praise him either for method or accuracy, or indeed, consult him at all save for sheer lack of a substitute. When Stubbs spoke thus, the last quarter of the century had still to run; yet when it closed, he might safely have affirmed that its entire course had brought us only two really outstanding contributions to German history—Carlyle's *Frederick the Great* and Seeley's *Stein*. Yet both are, of course, first and foremost, biographies, however broadly planned, and there are many who roundly deny the former's claim to rank as history at all.

Since the turn of the century, it is true that some of the worst gaps have been filled; and I venture to think that British scholarship has not yet received sufficient credit for its remarkable achievement during the war. That three such books as Sir Adolphus Ward's *Germany*, Mr. Grant Robertson's *Bismarck*, and the essays on *German Culture* edited by Professor W. P. Paterson—books which are models of impartiality and balanced judgment—should have appeared at the very height of a life-and-death struggle with Germany, is a fact which the "Ninety-six German Professors" of sorry fame would do well to ponder. That the British historian can write without animus has been still further proved since the war by Mr. Headlam-Morley, Mr. Gooch and Mr. Dawson.

Though these and other writers have redeemed us from utter reproach, it still remains true that German history has been deplorably neglected in Britain; and indeed we have not even taken the trouble to translate many a foreign historical classic. But when we turn South and East from Germany, we seem at once to leave a forest-clearing and plunge into the primeval jungle. To this day the English language does not possess any

history of Austria-Hungary, good, bad or indifferent. It is true that Mr. Steed's brilliant survey of the Habsburg Monarchy on the eve of dissolution offers the reader the clear insight of history that has been lived and felt before it has been written. But all around him stands unexplored and virgin forest.

Bohemia is more fortunate: for the admirable outline of her history by Mr. C. E. Maurice has been re-inforced by a whole series of scholarly works in English by that gifted historian, the late Count Lützow. Polish history can only be studied in the most perfunctory of text-books, though Polish national psychology has found more adequate interpreters in Miss Gardner and Professor Boswell. Of Serbia, we possessed no adequate history until Mr. Temperley published his short survey in 1917; and of the Southern Slavs as a whole, my own very incomplete book remained both the best and the worst, *because the only*, account, until the war produced a crop of ephemeral literature on the subject. Of Bulgaria, there is as yet no detailed history in English, though one from the pen of Lady Grogan may soon be expected. On Roumania there is literally nothing save a few trifling pamphlets, hastily compiled for purposes of the war.

On the Eastern Question as a whole, we have nothing better than Mr. Marriott's hasty collection of war essays; while on Turkey there is a mass of useful and even instructive publications, but no general history which can be mentioned in the same breath with Hammer-Purgstall's ponderous but irreplaceable classic, or with the still more solid compilations of Zinkeisen and Iorga. It is true that, in the work of Mr. Gibbons and Professor Lybyer, we have the first promise of better things.

On such an occasion my survey of the field was bound to be rapid and to avoid detail; and it is true that closer investigation would reveal here and there individual works of real merit. But those of you who are at all acquainted with the subject, will, I am certain, not quarrel with my main contention, that the history of Central and South-

Eastern Europe has been deplorably neglected in this country, and that at many points the very foundations have still to be laid. It will obviously be my task to appeal for workers in this field, and to those who may respond I can at least hold out the prospect of an embarrassing freedom from competition. I cannot expect that my field of operation will appeal to the ordinary pass student; but I do certainly look to the post-graduate world for recruits, and can assure them that the holder of this Chair will always be at their disposal for advice and co-operation, both at King's College and at the Institute of Historical Research. Moreover, as time goes on, the development of the *Slavonic Review* and other kindred schemes of publication should offer a means of publishing serious research work, such as has not hitherto existed. We now have a complete machinery for honours degrees not only in the language and literature of the particular Slavonic countries concerned—but also in their history and economics; and thus we provide the only possible basis for post-graduate study of their whole internal development.

II.

This Chair is officially described as one of "Central European History," and it may therefore seem illogical that its province should be defined as "the history of the area covered by the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Balkan States, with the exclusion of Greece." In any case I shall feel bound to put the widest possible interpretation upon the term "Central European History"; and while naturally concentrating my attention mainly upon an area to which I have already devoted the last 17 years, to include also from time to time within my purview the history of modern Germany, and general diplomatic history—both of them subjects in which the fate of the Habsburg dominions and the evolution of the Eastern question are inextricably involved. But, in saying this, I feel especially bound to express the hope that we

shall not have to wait very long for the foundation of a Chair of specifically German History. If and when it comes, its holder can be assured, despite all political and national issues, of a neighbourly welcome from the holder of this Chair, and of our definite recognition of his right, and even duty, to conduct friendly raids and incursions such as I am conducting to-day, into neighbouring territory.

In the present state of historical study specialisation is inevitable, but this must never serve as an excuse for dispensing with the broad world-aspects of any particular historical problem. "That man's the best cosmopolite," wrote Tennyson in bad verse but admirable sentiment, "Who loves his native country best"; and this is but another way of saying that nationalism, if properly conceived, is not a *cul-de-sac* of hate and insularity, but is the only sure road leading to the international standpoint. And in this age of darkness, so fitfully illuminated by the great ideal of a League of Nations, the historian cannot surely be convicted of propagandism if he frankly accepts the whole as greater than the part, and therefore quite logically the international as higher than the national. The British historian in particular, as he does not belong to any of the many rival nationalities which jostle each other throughout the wide area of Central Europe, is doubtless saved from the worst pitfall that threatens his Continental colleagues. Though distance may sometimes lend too great enchantment to the view, it at least gives perspective. But this is not enough, for he must bear constantly in mind that should he place undue emphasis upon the purely national or racial aspect of events, he will at once be lowering the standards of the Chair and ignoring the interpretation very wisely placed upon "regional studies" by the University authorities when they first committed themselves to the general principle—the view, namely, that small national units (especially those whose cultural development is recent) are not a fitting subject for higher academic study, unless they are

from the outset placed in a wider European or it may even be an universal setting.¹

Applying this to my own field, I shall endeavour to interpret Habsburg history in the light of a constant and sustained dynastic policy, hampered throughout its course by that peculiar duality of aim and outlook which is inherent in the geography of countries poised midway between East and West. In dealing with the history of the Czechs, I shall lay special stress upon the relations of Bohemia with the medieval Empire, upon the place of Hussitism in the political and religious thought of Europe, upon the interaction of Czech and German culture and political theory during the last century. In dealing with Hungary I shall emphasise those peculiar constitutional doctrines which an Asiatic nomad people, transfused by autochthonous Slav and immigrant Teuton blood, evolved in the heart of Europe and successfully upheld against all the efforts of Habsburg absolutism. In dealing with the Jugoslavs, I shall have especially to consider the rival influences of Rome and Byzantium and all that they imply in intellectual outlook. In a word, unless I am to disregard the fundamental issues and sink to the level of a mere chronicler, I am bound to dwell upon all those special problems which affect the border line between Teuton and Slav, as also between Slav and Latin, and upon the momentous mission which Providence would seem to have assigned to the Western Slav Nations, of achieving a synthesis between West and East.

III.

The experiment of which the Chair of Central European History forms a part, may be said to have a double side—the strictly academic, resting on the scientific and critical treatment of historical subjects, and another side belonging to the field of practical politics. The holder of this Chair

¹ "The unity of history," said Lord Morley in 1912, "is now orthodox doctrine, though accepted as orthodox doctrines sometimes are, in various senses." *Notes on Politics and History*, p. 51.

is thus from the outset faced by two fundamental issues, which in any case seem a fitting introduction to the more special subject of to-day's lecture.

First, can contemporary history be adequately and scientifically taught, or, for that matter, written; and, second, what is the true relation between history and politics? Neither question can be properly evaded on this occasion, for the double reason that the history of the last century (including contemporary history, however we may choose to define that study) is to be the main field of my research: and again, that regional studies—resting as they do upon a combination of history, language, literature and economics, have a definitely political no less than an academic value, and belong to the borderland where history and politics intermingle. Every man is likely to answer these two questions according as his outlook upon human development and human achievement is negative or positive. Only a fool will claim for the science of history that exactitude which certain sciences were alleged to possess before the days of Einstein. Yet we must not fall into the opposite extreme of assuming that historic truth is utterly unattainable. Such an attitude, if generally adopted, would, I believe, be as fatal to healthy political development as is the agnostic frame of mind to the life of the soul.

There is a well-known American University¹ whose historical department has inscribed over the door the dictum of Freeman, that "history is past politics, and politics are present history." In the generation that has passed since Freeman's death historians have grown more suspicious of such generalisations, and are likely to prefer Lord Acton's more cautious verdict that "politics and history are interwoven, but are not commensurate."² The conception of history has broadened since Carlyle declared that "the history of mankind is the history of its great men," and Froude in his "inaugural" endorsed this view. We have

¹ Johns Hopkins. See Herbert Adams, *Is History Past Politics?* 1896.

² *The Study of History*, p. 5.

come to realise that history is not merely a political record, but must take almost equal account of religious, racial, social and economic issues. That insistence on the comparative method, which was one of Freeman's most outstanding merits, has been increasingly justified by contributions in such fields as philology, ethnography and folklore. Above all, we have come to recognise the capital importance to the historian of psychology and its kindred studies—not merely of sympathetic concentration on historical personalities, such as we find in the work of Ste. Beuve (though "to leave out or lessen personality would be to turn the record of social development into a void")¹ but of penetrating the thought and catching the spirit of intellectual and of popular movements in the past—in other words, the gift of *nachfühlen*, or "living oneself into the past," as it has been called by the Swiss historian, Eduard Fueter,² in an interesting criticism of Leopold von Ranke. Neglect of psychology is at the root of almost all false historical estimates, for the motives which prompt men and sway events are notoriously mixed, and besides, as Lord Morley reminds us,³ "improvisation has far more to do in politics than historians or other people think." Lamprecht, it is true, argues that history can never wholly shake off a certain affinity to fiction, because it is impossible to be sure of all the inner motives.⁴ But even if she is to be called "a grandchild of Saga" (*eine Enkelin der Sage*), she need not be more ashamed of her origin than religion or philosophy.

A useful illustration of this broadening conception of history may be quoted from within the sphere of this new Chair: it is the recognition of the value of popular poetry and folksong as affording an insight into national character and even political development. It is true that Herder already recognised this as "an essential part of the history of the nations," but the professional historian's indifference

¹ Lord Morley, *Notes on Politics and History*, p. 37.

² *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, p. 478.

³ Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

⁴ *Deutsche Geschichte*, Bd. IV. (i), p. 134.

to such generous doctrine has only very recently been overcome. Some of you may remember the last address delivered in this college by Lord Bryce,¹ in which he pointed out with his usual felicity the importance of the Norse and Icelandic sagas for the study of certain periods of European history. An even more striking example of this is provided by the splendid popular ballads of the Serbs—and, indeed, of all branches of the Yugoslav race—as an index to the national character and history.

If, then, there is a growing tendency to admit that there is “*nihil humani*” which the historian may reject as altogether outside his sphere, there is something of a truce between the two warring theories which Mr. Frederic Harrison has summed up in the catchwords “mere literature” and “mere history.” History has to steer an even course between the Scylla of style and the Charybdis of—shall I say?—palæography. Those who concentrate above all upon “making history live,” as the phrase goes, only too often themselves become uncritical in their search for effect. Yet the instinct is sound, for unless we can make it live, history must, perforce, remain a poor dead thing—mere decaying vegetable matter, unfit for human digestion, and of little use even as leaf mould.

Nowhere, however, is this broadening process more apparent than in the growing recognition that contemporary history is a fit subject for instruction, or at least that the very grave objections to its teaching are outweighed by the urgent need for what is, after all, becoming part of a training in citizenship. I yield to none in my belief in the study of history for its own sake, but surely it is well-nigh impossible to-day to maintain the attitude adopted by some highly distinguished historians of the nineteenth century and to deny to history any utilitarian basis whatsoever. This surely savours of that most inane of all the arguments employed in favour of the classics, their complete uselessness in all practical callings of life—an argument which is, of course, not merely inane but radically untrue. No; the study of

¹ At a meeting of the Historical Association last winter.

history has its uses alike for the statesman and for the plain man, and though each generation will always commit its own blunders and follies, and though history never repeats itself to the extent of being a mathematical and infallible guide for the events of to-day, its study is none the less of all things the most salutary, the most sobering, the most catholic of educations—the mirror in which we can see and know ourselves and can also gather courage for the future. And it is just at that ill-defined and indefinable point where history becomes merged in politics, that its right understanding becomes most imperative. As early as 1836, in his inaugural lecture at Berlin, Ranke¹ stated the argument as follows: “A knowledge of the past is imperfect without a knowledge of the present. We cannot understand the present without a knowledge of earlier times. The past and the present join hands. Neither can exist or be perfect without the other.” The second of these assertions is so widely accepted as to have become a commonplace, but the first is by no means so obvious. And yet I believe that it was no accident that the greatest of modern historians should at the outset of his professional career have laid special stress upon what is the real justification of the teaching of contemporary history. The past as a key to the present—this is true of every country and period. The present as a key to the past—this is peculiarly true of Central and South-Eastern Europe.

A few instances selected almost at random should suffice to bring this home. In Hungary throughout the half-century preceding the Great War political parties divided into two main currents, which were widely known by the historical label of '48 and '67, according as their followers stood for the revolutionary settlement of 1848 or the Dualist Compromise of 1867. In Roumania the statue of Michael the Brave, who died in 1601, became a rallying point of irredentist stump-orators, and he himself a symbol of national unity. To the Magyar “Mohács field,” to the Czech the burning of Huss and the disaster of the White

¹ *Sämmtliche Werke*, Bd. XXII.

Mountain, to the Croat the treason and death of Zrinski and Frankopan, are living realities no less than the events of the Great War, and have a direct influence upon popular psychology and national aspirations. In Serbia—most memorable instance of all—the fatal defeat of Kosovo, which marks the fall of the mediæval Serbian Empire in 1389, became for centuries the symbol of national re-birth and unity—a symbol of almost Messianic meaning, of victory through defeat and of perfection through suffering.

If, then, past and present are interlocked and react daily upon each other, the importance of studying quite recent history, as well as that of earlier periods, can hardly be gainsaid. The French were the first to recognise contemporary history as a scientific study, and the labours of such men as Sorel, Rambaud and Lavissee have amply justified their foresight. Scarcely less epoch-making in my own special field has been the work of my friends and colleagues of the sister Institute of Slav Studies in Paris, the late Professor Ernest Denis and his successor Professor Louis Eisenmann. Several circumstances have combined of late years to habilitate such studies in the public eye. On the one hand the increasing intrusion of men without any diplomatic training into the sphere of international politics has served to lay bare the need for at least a minimum of historical knowledge on the part of those who decide frontiers and the fate of peoples.¹ On the other hand, the sources for contemporary history have year by year swelled in volume until, as Lord Acton once said, "there is more fear of drowning than of drought." Even before war

¹ Marshal Keith, in his *Memoirs* (1734), passes the following verdict upon the Duke of Mar, the incompetent Jacobite leader of 1715:—"He was bred up to the pen, and was early brought into business, had good natural parts, but few acquired, and knew so little of some of the commonest parts of sciences, that a gentleman of good credit assured me *he saw him look for the Dutchy of Deux Ponts in a map of Hungary, Valachia and Transilvania.*" It would thus appear that the standards of knowledge in statesmen have not risen since Keith's day: and indeed a famous statesman of our own day has been known to ask 'who ever heard of Teschen?' and to evolve a policy in Asia Minor without knowing the whereabouts of Cilicia.

and revolution led certain Governments to publish all, or ostensibly all, their innermost diplomatic secrets, there was a tendency to relax archive restrictions in many directions. Indeed, the first stage in this process may be said to date from the unification of Italy, when the archives of Venice and the evicted dynasties were thrown open. Then, again, the modern Press, while increasing the labour of research, also provides innumerable keys to, and checks upon, information, such as no previous age possessed. Besides, the Press, and the habits of mind which it has bred, have contributed more than any other single factor to the breakdown of the old absolute secrecy, and conversely to the practice of indiscretion. To-day there are more people in every secret, more cross-currents of interest and sympathy, greater temptations to speak out, than perhaps ever in the past. This is shown not only by the vast crop of memoirs by public men of every rank, and by the mass of diplomatic papers published by order of almost every Government save our own and the French, but also by the impossibility of keeping secret even the most solemnly guarded agreements and memoranda.

Let me give but two instances from my own sphere of study. The secret conventions of 1912, upon which the Balkan League against Turkey was based, were almost certainly made known to Austria-Hungary before ever war broke out that autumn, and in the course of 1913 almost all the important facts bearing upon their conclusion became public property. Then, again, the most rigorous secrecy was a foremost condition of the treaty concluded between the Triple Entente and Italy on 26th April, 1915, and yet its essential details did not merely become known almost instantly to the enemy, but within a week of its conclusion had reached even me, then an entirely unofficial person, from other no less unofficial sources in Petrograd and Paris. (This is the same treaty of which President Wilson professed entire ignorance at the Peace Conference in 1919.)

The publicity of modern life provides splendid weapons for misrepresentation: but, on the whole, it is steadily

justifying the old adage that "murder will out"—even when it is diplomatic or historical. In short, it should be easy, if time and space permitted, to make out a very strong case for contemporary history as a perfectly practicable study, possessing even marked advantages over its rivals. And those critics who continue to pour contempt upon modern as opposed to ancient history—a contempt which we moderns do *not* return—may be reminded that their argument, if pushed to its logical conclusion, overthrows their own idols Herodotus, Thucydides and Tacitus, probably the three greatest writers of contemporary history that ever lived, and a permanent beacon of hope to us poor moderns.

If I may permit myself, in passing, a brief raid into a cognate, though highly contentious field, I would submit that the true answer to Lord Loreburn's weighty, and to my mind unanswerable plea, that we are not in any real sense "a self-governing nation in foreign affairs,"¹ lies in the fact that as a nation we have so lamentably neglected the study of history, and above all of recent history, as to be unable to exercise that control of foreign affairs which can only come through knowledge. The only cure for the present unsatisfactory and haphazard position is "the growth of knowledge about foreign countries, and of the consciousness that foreign policy is not a monopoly of the few, but the direct and vital concern of every man and woman in these islands. For upon it depends the issue of peace and war, and millions have died in battle since 1914, because the last generation refused to interest itself in international politics and hugged itself in the fancied security conferred by a strip of narrow sea."² Mr. Frederic Harrison, then, was surely right when he wrote: "Nothing but a thorough knowledge of the social system, based upon a regular study of its growth, can give us the power we require to affect it! For this end we need one thing above all—we need history."³

¹ *How the War Came* (1919), p. 225.

² *See my Europe in the Melting Pot*, p. xiii.

³ *The Meaning of History*, p. 19.

IV.

That the questions which I have raised to-day are far from being merely academic, becomes clearly apparent as soon as we turn to consider the part played by historians and historical writings in the shaping of political events. Even in England it has been far greater than is commonly supposed. It is true that no historian has played more than a secondary part in public affairs, though many historians, from Macaulay to the late Lord Bryce and Mr. Fisher, have rendered very high public service. But the work of Hallam, Macaulay, Stubbs and others of lesser fame has, so to say, stabilised constitutional tradition in this country and actually passed into the political consciousness of the nation; while the Teutonic theory expounded by Freeman and Green unquestionably affected the general attitude of this country both towards France and Russia during the Victorian era. Indeed, it ought not to be difficult to demonstrate from modern British history that in the words of Lord Acton "the movement of ideas are not the effect, but the cause of public events."¹

In France the influence of the historian has been more direct and obvious. Guizot used the history of our own Civil War to point a moral and discredit revolutionary doctrine in France. Mignet's brilliant survey of the French Revolution was, in the words of Mr. Gooch,² an incident in the campaign against the Bourbon dynasty; Lamartine's rhetorical improvisation contributed materially to the fall of Louis Philippe, while Thiers' detailed history of the whole revolutionary period was inspired by essentially political motives. The works of Michelet and of Taine, to-day so riddled by criticism, yet assured of immortality no less by their powers of reasoning than by their seductive style, may fairly be said to have successively revolutionised the whole outlook of the modern Frenchman towards the past which gave him birth and the future towards which

¹ Inaugural lecture on *The Study of History* (1896).

² *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 195.

he was still striving when the flood gates of 1914 were opened.¹

It is, however, when we turn to Central Europe that this influence is seen to be decisive. In the Germany of the nineteenth century, no historian ever reached the same eminence as Guizot and Thiers in France. None the less, the influence of the historians on the direct course of political development was beyond all doubt greater in Germany than in either France or England. "Without their aid," says Schmoller, "the Empire could never have been placed on its feet." And "if anyone will make a list of their names," Lord Acton reminds us, "he will see that such a phalanx was never arrayed before, and will also detect one of the *arcana imperii* by which the rude strength centred in a region more ungenial than Latium was employed to absorb and to stiffen the diffused, sentimental and strangely impolitic talent of the studious German.")² All the greatest—Niebuhr, Dahlmann, Waitz, Ranke, Droysen, Häusser, Mommsen, Sybel, Treitschke—a list with which I do not think Lord Acton himself would quarrel—were conscious workers for the Prussian idea. Prussia, as the world now knows to its cost, laid too great stress upon discipline and material force; but it also paid full homage to knowledge and education, and reaped the fruits of this policy by rallying the whole intellectual class to its standard. It was thus no mere accident, but a just retribution, that the men whom I have mentioned supplied Prussia with her political driving force, while Austria, thanks to the consistent repression of all thought and culture under Francis, Metternich and Bach, during a period extending from 1792 to 1859, only produced secondary or even tertiary lights in the world of historical, political and social theory. Thus the hackneyed phrase about the playing-fields of Eton found its counterpart in the German claim that "it was the schoolmaster who won the battle of Königgrätz."

The first generation of German historians stood under

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

² *Essays on Modern History*, p. 378.

the spell of Herder, who quite logically bases his philosophy of history upon religion, and defining history as the education of man, speaks boldly of "natural laws of political history." Moreover, his belief in the unchangeableness of national character—which, curiously enough, he seems to have derived from Voltaire—was to exercise immense influence upon the expanding idea of Nationality in Europe, and infected many of his successors with the conviction that the organic development of a nation cannot be deflected by ideas imported from elsewhere, and that good work can only be done by those who remain true to their own nationality. Obviously this theory of unchangeability is in open conflict with the formative effects of geography and climate, or, again, of conquest and domination by masterful neighbours. That the Italian is essentially unsentimental, that logic is innate in the French or Scottish mind, that the Englishman has always shown a preference for political compromise and half-measures, may fairly be argued. But it is absurd to say that the French Revolution has left the national character unaffected, or that Scotland possessed in the centuries before the Reformation the democratic outlook which characterises it to-day. Certain fundamental traits endure, but others change, and if there are cycles in history—or the weather—it is hard to resist the conclusion that there are also cycles in national character.¹

The essential difference between the British and the German school of historians is, that the former has, to this day, remained independent of the State, whereas the latter's dependence upon it had steadily increased during the hundred years preceding the Great War, and culminated in an almost Byzantine outlook upon the State and the Sovereign.² Even early in the nineteenth century the germ

¹ In this connection Niebuhr may be quoted (I., p. 44). He maintains national character to have been far more sharply defined at the close of the mediæval and the opening of the modern era. "A man was more French than German, but also the peculiarities of individual branches were stronger—and thus a man was more Norman, more Swabian, and so on.

² A classic example is to be found in Lamprecht's essay on William II.

of future troubles may be traced in an excessive glorification of the rights of the State, which the Germans oppose to the revolutionary doctrine of the Rights of Man. Moreover, Germany developed its own peculiar legend of the French Revolution, whose underlying ideas are opposed, because they are felt to be a danger to Germany herself.¹ That "alliance between history and politics" which Sybel was, ere long, to advocate,² had already begun when Niebuhr and Dahlmann, in two epoch-making courses of lectures, tried to hold the balance between extreme republicanism and monarchical absolutism as equally unsuited to modern ideas, and used the two revolutions of England and of France to point a moral; and, again, when Dahlmann pilloried side by side "the impudent regicide" (den frechen Königsmord) of 1793, and "the coldly calculated murder of a nation"—the Polish partition of 1795. The same process is visible in Droysen's lectures on the War of Liberation, and in Gervinus' brilliant survey of German literary development. The Revolution of 1848 forced history out of abstract into realistic channels; the masses now entered the political arena, and the historians could not resist the temptation to appeal to and influence them. They already felt the urgency of the problem which, in the days of Universal Suffrage, came to be defined as that of "educating our masters." The historian began to invade the province of the publicist.

While the romantic movement was still at its height, German historians, led by the great Ranke, tried to keep politics at arms-length. While certainly not unwilling to exercise a direct personal influence upon the actions of monarchs or ministers, Ranke elaborated the theory that no epoch can claim an absolute pre-eminence, "so that we have no special cause either for despair or for pride and arrogance."³ "Never in our Europe," he argued, "has

¹ Guiland, *L'Allemagne et ses Historiens*, p. 63.

² In his inaugural at Marburg in 1856: *Über den Stand der neueren deutschen Geschichtsschreibung*, p. 12.

³ Inaugural (1836) see *Sämmtliche Werke*, Bd. XXII., p. 292.

any one power or any one dogma attained to solitary supremacy"¹—a truth which was revealed more strikingly than ever by the issue of the Great War. But he, too, found it impossible to resist the call of contemporary history, and his survey of Serbia since 1804, based very largely upon unwritten material supplied by the great philologist Vuk Karadžić, will always remain one of the most remarkable products, even of his unwearying pen. He could not stop the drift of his pupils from history into politics, and he himself, after shaping the mind of Frederick William IV. and Maximilian II., and writing his famous history of the English Civil War, with the contemporary conflict of Crown and Parliament in Prussia constantly at the back of his mind, was at last, on the 50th anniversary of his doctorate (1883), to receive the public thanks of Bismarck "for his long years of collaboration in the common work for the fatherland."

Ranke from the first challenged Buckle's view that history is determined by physical laws, virtually beyond the control of mankind. "It is not doctrines," he said, "which convulse the world, but powerful personalities which incarnate doctrines"; and this, we must acknowledge, is a theory, which, if pushed home, inevitably brings politics and history together. Even in 1843 the new *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, published by Adolf Schmidt, with the active adhesion of Ranke and Giesebrecht, proclaims history as "a science which more than any other, is related to politics, and is, indeed, its mother and teacher."²

Ranke himself never stood committed to the extreme doctrine of Personality as the root-fact in History, and in 1882 we find him writing to Manteuffel that "men are made by great occasions" (*Grosse Verhältnisse machen die Männer*). But the current of public, and even of academic, opinion, was already with Sybel when he endorsed the

¹ M. Ritter, *L. von Ranke, seine Geistesentwicklung und seine Geschichtsschreibung*. (1896), p. 24.

² Vol. I., p. iv: "Politics are the blossom of history, and the present its last leaf."

phrase of Treitschke, "Strong men make the age" (*die starken Männer machen die Zeit*). At the very moment when materialism began to run wild, the essentially Christian doctrine of personality is stressed and over-stressed. In place of demonic forces working outside man and making of him the merest plaything, an attempt is made to translate Free Will from theological into historical terms, by men who are certainly not products of an age of faith.

Sybel and Treitschke are the supreme expression of the political historian. Starting from the contention that history is "durch und durch beweisbar,"¹ Sybel sets himself to destroy the legend of the revolution, and at the same time "to restore the broken contact between the historic development of Eastern and Western Europe."² His books, like Häusser's *Deutsche Geschichte* before them, were in the words of Treitschke "quite as much a political deed as a scientific achievement." Their educational effect upon the German nation was to alienate it finally from French radicalism and thus to strengthen Prussian and Hohenzollern policy. As a younger man, he challenged Giesebrecht's theory that the study of the medieval Empire, of a Germany once powerful and united, might serve to stimulate the modern dream of unity. But after rejecting this in the true spirit of Ranke, as an inroad of history into the field of politics, he himself committed an even bolder inroad. He, and with him Treitschke, provided the reasoned historical basis for the Little German policy which triumphed at Königgrätz in 1866 and at Versailles in 1871; and just as the writings of Friedrich List provided the economic cement, so no less surely did the historians (and very notably these two) lay the political foundations on which the structure of German unity was to rest.

Let me, before I leave this section of my subject, quote a characteristic passage from Sybel's inaugural lecture.³

"The historian," he says, "who tries to assume a

¹ *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, Bd. LIV. (article Sybel), p. 655.

² *Ibid.*, p. 654.

³ Sybel, *op. cit.* (1856), p. 7.

dignified neutrality in respect of the great world-shaking problems of religion, of politics, of nationality, is doomed to become either lifeless or affected; . . . He will have no moral enthusiasm, he will strive in vain for style and beauty. That our historical writers proclaimed their love of country and political conviction, gave them for the first time the possibility to work as an attractive force and to attain clear artistic form." These theories are only too soon transfused by Treitschke, whose highest praise for Häusser is that he looks at German history "with German eyes;" who insists "that every generation has the right to portray the past as it appears to its own eyes,"¹ and who declares, "that he would despair of God and the world, if a history like that of Prussia were to flow into the sand."² Fueter may be quite right in asserting that "Treitschke's influence upon historical learning was less than is generally supposed,"³ but his influence upon the popular consciousness and upon the journalistic world can hardly be exaggerated. The fact that in our own country his name was hardly known before the War, save to a handful of historical writers, and seemingly never quoted save by the omniscient Lord Acton and the faintly prophetic Professor Cramb, serves to emphasise still further what I have already said of our neglect of German history and political thought, and of the need for mutual interpretation both between friends and foes, if such events as the Great War are not to come upon us once more like a thief in the night.

Treitschke certainly did more than any other man to poison the wells of historical science in Germany and to give currency to the seductive but immoral motto, "My country, right or wrong," which fortunately has never stood unchallenged in either of its alleged homes of origin. He thereby contributed to that "debasement and perversion of University ideals and methods in Germany" of which

¹ *Deutsche Geschichte*, IV., p. 178.

² Treitschke to Bluntschli, 7 March 1867, cit. *Preussische Jahrbücher*, August 1920. (H. Ulmann, *Treitschke und der Krieg*, p. 158.)

³ *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, p. 546.

Professor Zimmern has recently written.¹ There is no greater tragedy in modern history than the process by which the most representatives of a culture of which all Europe had once been justly proud, sought (I again quote Mr. Zimmern) "to readjust their whole philosophy and scheme of values, in order to bring it into conformity with a Government as to whose conduct and motives they were content to be left in the dark."

This is a lesson which we who would fain build up a new School of Foreign Studies cannot afford to neglect—a lesson which brings us back to the question which I raised at the outset, regarding the teaching of contemporary history and the proper relation between history and politics.

V.

Let me turn from the forest clearing to the jungle. In Germany the memory of a great past, contrasting with present political miseries, was a prime incentive to the revival of historical studies. But even at the worst Germany lived her own life, and her political inferiority did but throw into greater relief her achievements in literature and in imagination and learned enquiry. But in other parts of Central and Eastern Europe there had been, not merely passing eclipse, but virtual extinction; and it was here that the historical tradition was to play an absolutely decisive part, to rescue whole nations from oblivion and eventually to present the new generation of schoolboys with a radically different map.

It is obvious that at this stage in my lecture I cannot begin the survey of a new field so vast and so unfamiliar. I must be content in most cases with the merest passing allusion, in order that I may concentrate on what is perhaps the most striking illustration of my main thesis. (In parenthesis you will notice that on leaving Germany we enter an area where it is not only more convenient, but almost inevitable, to divide the subject by races, and no longer by states.) Among the Austrian Germans, then, as I

¹ *Europe in Convalescence*, 2nd edition, pp. 70-71.

already hinted, there was no scope for intellect under the old *régime*, and even in the constitutional era since 1867, such little influence as was exercised by the new intellectual and academic class upon the conduct of affairs came from the economists rather than the historians, who may fairly rank as a mere annexe to the larger historical school of Germany. The rôle of such men as Schäffle (really a non-Austrian), Menger, Suess, was valuable, but in no way decisive; and the deplorable part played by the late Dr. Friedjung as the unwitting tool of Count Aehrenthal and his official diplomatic forgers, might well be quoted as a warning to the historian to avoid the whirlpools of political life. His misuse by the Foreign Minister was on a footing with the common practice of Hungarian statesmen to keep a tame historian or publicist to edit their papers, write their memoirs, and rumour has it, produce articles which it suited them to sign. The general attitude of the authorities towards the man of letters as a man of affairs is illustrated by the fate of Professors Lammasch and Redlich, two Austrians of international repute, who were only admitted to office on 28th October, 1918, when their prophecies of disaster had been fulfilled and there was nothing left for them save to liquidate the Habsburg State.

If we turn to the Magyars, it would be at once an under- and an over-statement, to assert that among them the influence of the historian was supreme. In a certain sense every Magyar of the privileged class was his own historian, or at least his own constitutional theorist. Nowhere probably was a knowledge of precedent and practice more widespread; and this was Hungary's strength in the long centuries of struggle against dynastic infringement and perfidy, her weakness under the changed circumstances of modern life, when ancient constitutional theory left no room for the "natural rights" claimed by the so-called "un-historic nations."

Among the Poles, again, memories of the historic past were no doubt decisive in rendering the national spirit invincible in the dark days of partition and repression; but

these memories were voiced, not so much by the historian as by the poet and the mystic. Mickiewicz's memorable course of lectures on the Slav nations, delivered in 1840, at the Collège de France, are poetry, rhetoric, inspiration—anything but history, though they were in themselves a historical event of real significance. The Messianic doctrine which runs through the poetry of Mickiewicz and his great contemporaries, is a spiritual experience rather than a political programme. Poland after all was prostrate, bleeding and tortured, yet never dead; and it is of the dead and their resurrection that I have to speak.

Take for instance the Roumanians. What could be more gloomy and unpromising than their situation in the middle of the XVIIIth century—the two principalities ground under the heel of the Sublime Porte and of his jackals, the corrupt Phanariot Princes; the Roumanians of Transylvania subjected by the dominant Magyars to all the rigours of political social and religious helotry? Yet at this very nadir of the national fortunes the voice of History sounded in their ears. A handful of priests trained in the despised Uniate rite which the Jesuits had devised for their further enthrallment, saw with eager eyes the array of captive figures on Trajan's Column in Rome, and invoked the memories of ancient Dacia and their Roman ancestry. These memories struck deep in the consciousness of the whole people, even of the most uneducated; and the historical chronicles composed by the younger Micu, Șincai, and Peter Maior, uncritical and even fantastic as they were, and only circulating in manuscript owing to unfavourable political conditions, none the less secure to their authors the right to rank among the founders of Great Roumania. The Daco-Roman tradition has often overshot the mark, but its main thesis has been endorsed by sober research, and its decisive influence upon the rebirth of the nation cannot be contested.

Even among the Bulgarians, held as in a vice between Turkish barbarism and Greek ecclesiastical intolerance, and deprived of the very elements of culture to an extent unknown even to the Roumanians—even here history played

a first part in quickening the dead soul of the nation. The humble Bulgarian monk Paisi, writing his all too naive and primitive "History of the Bulgarian Peoples, Tsars and Saints" (1762) in the retirement of his cell on Athos, and his pupil Bishop Sofronij, who died an exile at Bucarest in 1816 after cruel sufferings from the Turks, were veritable pioneers in the task of awakening patriotic interest in a great if forgotten past, and in a despised and persecuted dialect.

Among the Serbs the influence of history upon the national revival is even more striking, though it may perhaps be best described as the general influence of the Muse Clio herself rather than any of her special votaries. I should be the very last to minimise the achievement of Dositej Obradović and still more of the Jugoslav Grimm, Vuk Karadžić, in stimulating the national sentiment, the linguistic and spiritual unity of their disunited race, or again of certain eminent Croats in collecting and interpreting the history and constitutional documents of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia. But the deciding influence must be sought in the soul of the down-trodden peasantry itself—clinging to the vanished memories of Tsar Dušan, lawgiver and warrior, of Lazar, who chose a heavenly rather than an earthly kingdom, of Miloš Obilić, the noble knight who set that dangerous Balkan precedent of regicide, of Marko Kraljević, the hero of fantastic adventures and prodigious valour. The mourning for Kosovo was perpetuated by the black band upon the Montenegrin's cap; and the blind guslar chanted the ballads of Serbia's past—often, it is true, distorted into highly unhistoric forms. And thus it came about that in 1912 the soldiers of King Peter wept when they debouched upon the sacred field of Kosovo, and at Prilep saw the vision of Marko leading them on to victory; and that in the bleak Dalmatian uplands a Croat shepherd boy, Ivan Meštrović, learnt from village bards that passion for national unity which inspires so much even of his art.

But the crowning example of my thesis is provided by the Czechs and their brothers the Slovaks. Two facts stand out pre-eminent in their history,—the extremities of fortune

by which it is marked, and the extent to which it has been shaped and influenced by pure intellect as opposed to mere material force. Bohemia, after leaving her mark upon the late middle ages as a strong national kingdom and leading the vanguard of religious reform, suffered an even more complete eclipse than Poland herself and lay like a corpse for two whole centuries, so utterly forgotten and of no account, that her once glorious name could become a label that suggests the art student and the librettist. So low had she fallen, that early last century, when a small group of Czech scholars use to meet in the parlour of a Prague inn, one of them is alleged to have exclaimed, "If this roof should fall, there would be an end of the Czech national movement."

But if Bohemia's ruin had seemed complete, her resurrection in the XIXth century is one of the most remarkable turns of fortune's wheel, that the modern world can show; and it was the work not of soldiers and of courtiers, but of thinkers and of scholars. "This, however, was an entirely natural evolution among a people which had long ago selected as its national heroes John Hus, priest, professor, reformer and philosopher—truly 'the poor persone' of his day—and Comenius, one of the founders of modern education. Upon each successive step the savant left his indelible mark. First Dobrovský and Jungman laid the necessary linguistic and scientific basis, then followed Šafářik with his epoch-making studies in Slavonic archæology, Kollár the prophet of Panslavism in its pre-Moscow days, and Palacky, the founder and inspirer of Czech historical research, and the leader of the nation during the revolution of 1848 and throughout the period of constitutional experiment in Austria." In the first days of reviving national consciousness, the Czechs were ready, nay eager, for an understanding with Austria; but since the establishment of Dualism in 1867 and above all since Francis Joseph's public perjury in 1871, the movement became progressively radical, and towards the close of his life Palacky coined the prophetic phrase, "Before Austria was, we were, and when Austria no longer is, we still shall be."

The details of the struggle which led to Czecho-Slovak independence lie quite outside my present purpose. I am merely concerned to emphasise that at every turn it was history which provided the inspiration—history in its very widest sense, whether interpreted by the philologist, the antiquarian, the collector of ballads and folk-songs, the ethnographer and folklorist, the philosopher or the historian pure and simple. It was the appeal to the historic past that laid the foundations of the new freedom.

In passing it is only right to remind you of the part played by legendary history, and even falsified history, in reshaping a nation's mind. Hanka's deliberate forgery of mediæval Czech ballads had a direct political effect such as cannot be claimed for his nearest literary affinity, James Macpherson, and it is one of President Masaryk's many titles to fame that he risked popular obloquy by their exposure, lest a lie should poison the sources of national tradition. To another category belongs the false history by which rival Balkan propagandists—Serb, Bulgar, Greek, Albanian, Vlach and Turk alike—have sought to justify purely political claims to disputed territory; to yet another the calculated *camouflage* by which Havlíček, the first and greatest of Czech journalists, wrote of Ireland and O'Connell and Repeal, when he meant Bohemia and her long-lost liberties, and thus for a time was able to evade the censorship of Metternich.¹

¹ A special niche must be reserved for the false history to which the founder of the Sinn Fein movement gave currency in 1905, when he put forward Hungarian abstention in the sixties as a proper model for Ireland in her struggle against England. The full measure of Mr. Griffith's misapprehension may be gathered from a comparison between the positive statesmanship of Deák and his hardly less great associates, Andrassy and Eötvös, and the negative and barren policy of abstention pursued by the Czechs from 1867 to 1879. Deák owed his victory, not to abstention, but to active collaboration at the psychological moment. The phrase by which he won Francis Joseph: "Hungary asks nothing more after Königrätz than before it"—is widely famous, but less so his explanation of its meaning: "because it was not a question of asking all we could get, but of not asking more than we were sure of being able to keep." Mr. Griffith, though he misconceived the lessons of Hungarian history, did pass this highest test of statesmanship in 1921 in a similar situation to Deák's, and thereby saved himself from the crushing verdict which history is likely to pass against his Republican rivals.

Let me reaffirm the view that the history of Czecho-Slovak renaissance and independence sets the crown upon my present argument. It is no mere accident, but a perfectly natural evolution, that placed the leadership of the new nation in the hands of a triumvirate of savants—the veteran philosopher and historian, Thomas Masaryk, and his two young lieutenants, Beneš, the lecturer in political economy, Štefaník the astronomer and explorer. I thus conclude my hurried survey with a name which (with pride, be it said) is inseparably associated with our young School of Slavonic Studies. President Masaryk is the true successor of Hus, Comenius and Palacký. His severely logical mind fixed upon “realism” as the true aim of politics, no less than of history and of thought and life, and he has given a new and honourable interpretation to that *Realpolitik* which has deservedly become a byeword with honest men. “Politics,” as the *Corriere della Sera* has well said, “is the art of possibilities.”¹ Masaryk has done his best to teach us that the realist can aim at nothing higher than to be a real man, and that true realism in politics is not a cynical disregard of principles, but a scrupulous reckoning with the facts of a given situation. He has taught us that character, not sleight-of-hand, is the first requirement of the statesman; that to be honest is not to be naïve or to nurse illusions, and that a straight fencer, fully trained to the use of his weapon, will prove a match for the bravo who plays foul. Masaryk, the leader of a new political school and of new diplomatic methods, beat the Ballplatz and the Wilhelmstrasse at their own game, and set us all that measured ideal of “optimism without illusions” (as I once tried to define it), upon which alone the New Europe and the new Society of Nations can build. This, then, is the creed which I make bold to set in the forefront of this budding enterprise in the University of London, for his is one of the chief names that illumine the border-land between history and politics.

I have tried to show how great has been, and still is, the influence of the historian upon the political and social

¹ (7 February 1920) “*La politica è l'arte delle possibilità.*”

development of Central Europe. Where the past and the present are so closely interwoven, it would seem specially incumbent upon the student of history to maintain contact with the men who are shaping the daily destinies of whatever country he may be studying. This is presumably the underlying motive of a clause included in the charter of foundation of my Chair, as of certain other Chairs devoted to analogous "Regional Studies"—providing for special leave for foreign travel—and of this clause I intend to take full advantage.

It is only by such contact with history in the making, that the historian can hope to escape from the faults of pedantry and unreality. It performs the same function as practical laboratory work to the pure scientist, for it helps to give a certain insight into the political methods of all ages, into the motives of politicians and diplomatists, and so helps towards a more balanced and human judgment, and offers a key to the riddles of the past. It is, indeed, a difficult problem, how to combine, on the one hand, academic calm and that aloofness and impartiality which we would fain associate with it, and on the other hand a knowledge of life and a sense of realities. And yet the historian must take his courage in both hands, and live at once in the present and in the past, drawing upon both as warnings for the future. There is obvious danger in a too free acceptance of Sybel's policy of "clothing the Universities in the colours of the present" (*in die Farben der Gegenwart kleiden*)¹ but it is just one more risk that must be taken, and, after all, Sybel and his followers are living signposts to warn us off marshy ground.

In conclusion, I feel bound to express my conviction that the surest test of a sound historian, or of a good teacher, lies in his attitude to the capital problem of omission and selection; for the selection of one's facts is, in itself, a judgment, and yet selection there must inevitably be, if we are to avoid drowning. To delay judgment till all the facts are before us, is to abandon all idea of criticism,

¹ *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, article on Sybel, p. 652.

since we can never have all the facts; it also leads to that frame of mind satirised by Goethe when he wrote :—

“ Was man nicht weiss, das eben brauchte man,
Und was man weiss, kann man nicht brauchen.”

Though an enthusiast for formidable arrays of facts, and, I fear, a grave sinner in this direction, I submit that the possession of too many facts is sometimes a fatal handicap, just as a sound judgment of the essential truth can often be reached without a knowledge of anything like *all* the facts. This simply means that while any fact, however trifling and worthless if detached, may provide some valuable clue and should, therefore, be preserved, yet on the other hand *all* facts are by no means essential, just as Dr. Barker has recently reminded us that all documents are not necessarily valuable because they are unprinted.

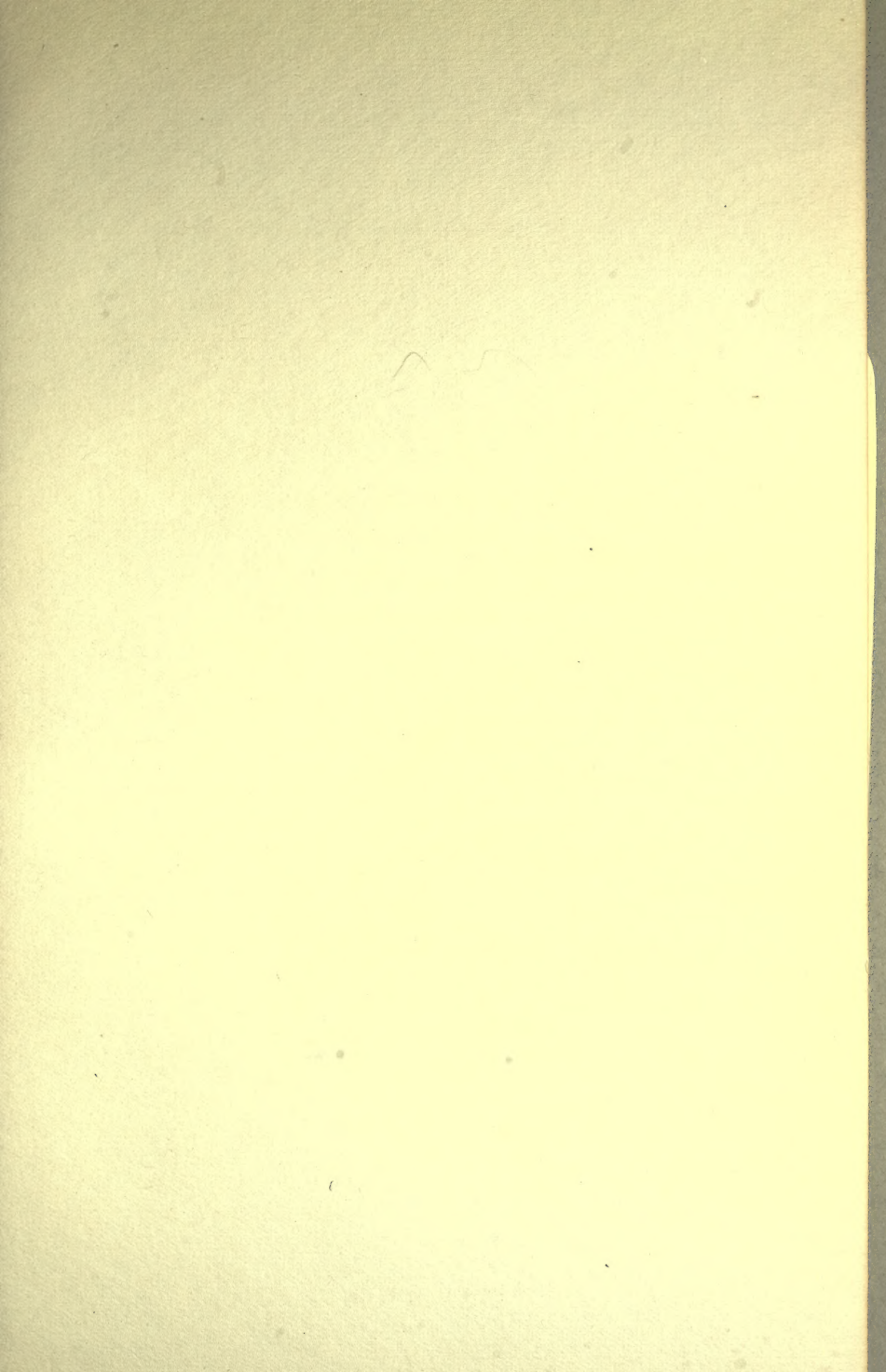
In a word, the only fundamental rule is never consciously to suppress essential facts; and to find the right line between omission and suppression must depend on the sound judgment or the honesty of the individual writer. What the average pupil or reader demands is, I believe, not so much abstention from any opinion or verdict—that merely produces boredom—as the provision of facts and documents by which such an opinion can be tested. He is then able to draw his own conclusions by the comparative method, which is the soundest of all methods. I believe, with Sir Thomas Browne, that “morality is not ambulatory,” that certain historical standards of truth do exist, and that just as there is a retributive justice which destroys great empires, so the historian who suppresses or perverts the truth will soon, rather than late, stand convicted before the bar of history.

It would be hard to find a better definition of the true historian's duty than that of Bacon—“to steer a middle course between the presumption of dogmatism and the despair of scepticism.” Complete perfection lies beyond

us, and we can but echo the words of Ranke in his memorable inaugural, "*Non attingunt metam, sed meta posita est.*" I, too, shall not attain the final goal of perfection, but at least the goal has been set, and I trust that nothing will drive me from the course.







THE SLAVONIC REVIEW

*A Survey of the Slavonic Peoples,
Their History, Economics, Philology and Literature.*

EDITORS:

Bernard Pares

R. W. Seton-Watson

Harold Williams

Among other notable articles in the new December Number (No. 2), are those on

Political and Economic Progress in Poland,

By the POLISH MINISTER and PROF. KUTRZEBA; on
SERBIA AND GREAT BRITAIN, by the JUGOSLAV
MINISTER; on

SLAVONIC STUDIES IN FRANCE; on
MODERN CZECH OPERA, by Mrs. NEWMARCH; on
THE STYLE OF DOSTOYEVSKY, and on
THE TRADE BALANCE OF RUSSIA.

No. 1 contains articles on
THE SLAVS AFTER THE WAR, by PRESIDENT MASARYK.
RUSSIA, by PETER STRUVE.
A SURVEY OF SLAVISTIC STUDIES, by VATROSLAV JAGIĆ.

Prominent features of the Review are its literary translations from the various Slavonic languages; its chronicle of events and policy in Eastern Europe; and its reviews and special bibliographies.

Published Thrice Annually (in each Academic Term)

*Subscriptions should be sent direct to the
Editors, King's College, Strand, London. W.C. 2.*

**Terms: 5/- net per number (with postage 5/6). Annual
Subscription 15/- net, post free.**

**PUBLISHED BY THE SCHOOL OF SLAVONIC STUDIES
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, KING'S COLLEGE.**

BYRE AND SPOTTISWOODE, LIMITED,
His Majesty's Printers, at 9, East Harding Street, E.C.4.

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

D
16
.2
S39

Seton-Watson, Robert William
The historian as a political
force in central Europe

